

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

2004 Program Overview

The President's Management Agenda calls for a government that is citizen-centered, results-oriented, promotes efficiency and innovation, remove barriers to change, and embraces citizens as full partners. This vision is presented in Secretary Norton's four C's -- Cooperation, Consultation and Communication, all in the service of Conservation. Across the nation, the Service responds by working with citizens and communities to protect and restore important coastal habitats. The program was assessed using the administration's Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) and was found to be "Adequate".

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is a model federal program that embodies the Administration's vision of government that is citizen-centered, results-oriented, market-based and is included in the Cooperative Conservation Initiative. The program has successfully established productive relationships with communities and citizens because the program is a voluntary habitat restoration program that provides financial assistance and restoration expertise to private landowners, tribes and other conservation partners who choose to improve the condition of fish and wildlife habitat on their land. Today over 70 percent of the fish and wildlife habitat remaining in the nation is on private lands. It is imperative that agencies charged with protection and management of these resources work collaboratively with the stewards of this land to conserve our nation's watersheds and landscapes.

This program, through voluntary partnerships, is helping to improve and protect the health and integrity of the watersheds in which people live, work, and play. Through voluntary habitat restoration projects, fish and wildlife management technical assistance, a one-on-one approach to customer satisfaction, and increased efforts to

control invasive species, this Program supports the draft DOI End Outcome Goals to improve the health of watersheds, landscapes and marine resources and sustain biological communities.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program Focus Areas

**People and Partnerships
Restoration of Native Habitats
High Quality Technical Assistance**

People and Partnerships

Private land stewardship is the most powerful conservation tool in America today. The Service has a well-organized infrastructure and a staff strategically operating in all 50 States and Puerto Rico to support landowners where they need it – on their own lands. For over 15 years, the Service has been developing lasting and productive partnerships with landowners and communities.

To date, the Partners Program has worked with over 28,700 landowners to voluntarily restore wetlands, streams, grasslands, woodlands and other important habitats that support fish and wildlife. In FY 2004, the Partners Program plans to work with 5,280 private landowners to:

- Restore 66,365 acres of vital wetlands habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, and amphibians.
- Restore 287,507 acres of native grasslands and woodlands for declining grassland nesting birds and cavity dwellers such as woodpeckers.
- Restore 830 miles of stream and riparian (stream-side) habitat for native fish, songbirds, and mammals.
- Remove from stream channels 36 decrepit culverts and obsolete road crossings to allow native fish access to upstream habitats.

In addition, dozens of private landowners will partner with the Service to control invasive species and to restore degraded habitats to full function. Approximately 39,683 acres of private land will be managed by fire, chemical treatment, bio-controls, mechanical removal, and other means to eradicate or prevent the spread of invasive species.

The program uses collaborative and innovative partnerships to effectively leverage resources (financial and other) at an average ratio of 2:1 (non-Service to Service dollars) to increase the effectiveness and scope of its activities. All of these restoration activities will be conducted one-on-one with the landowners towards the goal of incorporating habitat restoration into working farms and ranches. These activities contribute directly to the draft DOI End Outcome Strategies to restore and maintain proper functions to watersheds and landscapes and to sustain biological communities.

The Minnesota Habitat Corridors Project is one example of how the Service will work with dozens of private landowners and 13 federal, state and non-governmental organizations to restore “connectivity” to protected areas (e.g., state parks, national wildlife refuges). The goal is to restore over 40,000 acres of high quality wildlife habitat over a 2-year period and thereby multiply the benefits of the protected areas by linking them together and providing access to additional forage and breeding habitats. Game species, as well as rare, declining, threatened and endangered species will benefit from this undertaking. Local economies will also benefit from increased tourism opportunities, improved water quality, reduced flooding, and a healthier quality of life.

As part of the Service’s continued emphasis on customer satisfaction the Partners program will assess how cooperating landowners view the quality of the technical and financial assistance they have received in FY 2003 by conducting a nationwide survey of partnering landowners. Customer satisfaction is also vital element of the draft DOI Intermediate Outcome to improve information base, resource management and technical assistance.

Restoration of Native Habitats

Restored habitat provides many positive economic and ecological benefits for Americans, such as:

- Added value for hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing.
- Improved water quality and reduced water treatment costs.
- Reduced flooding impacts and clean-up costs.
- Sustained income for commercial fisheries, ranches and eco-tourism.

In 2004, the Service will work with 10-15 private landowners and a variety of other partners in the State of New Jersey to voluntarily restore up to 750 acres of native grasslands on private lands. These restorations will provide high quality habitat for declining species of grassland nesting birds (e.g., savannah sparrow and bobolink-- both State-listed threatened species in New Jersey) and provide soil and water quality benefits to targeted watersheds by improving forage production and pasture management. Primary partners in addition to the private landowners include the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, National Turkey Federation, private industry (e.g., Ferro Corporation), and the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service.

High Quality Technical Assistance

The Service provides technical assistance to private and government landowners, upon their request, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and to landowners who participate in USDA conservation programs such as the Wetlands Reserve Program, Farm Service Agency debt cancellation conservation contracts, Conservation Reserve Program, and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program.

In FY 2004, Service staff will respond to over 12,000 requests for technical assistance. This activity will directly contribute to the draft DOI Intermediate Outcome Strategy to improve information base, resource management and technical assistance.

Providing the public with information about its activities is one way that we help promote partnerships. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program website (<http://partners.fws.gov/>) contains information about Program activities, accomplishments and contacts.

Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) Review

During formulation of the 2004 budget, the Administration began using the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) to identify strengths and weaknesses of programs and to inform budget, management, and policy recommendations. The process generated extensive information on program effectiveness and accountability including the need for additional performance measures.

The principal PART findings for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program are:

- The Partners Program has a clearly defined purpose and is optimally designed.
- While the Partners Program conducts frequent informal reviews, the Partners Program policy does not mandate that the program undergo regularly scheduled objective, independent evaluations.
- Because the long-term outcome goals for the Partners Program are overly ambitious, the Program's annual accomplishments have, only to a small extent, demonstrated adequate progress in achieving its long-term outcome goals. However, the Partners Program is achieving its annual performance goals to a large extent and demonstrating improved efficiencies and cost effectiveness.

How did the budget respond to the PART findings for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program?

- The FY2004 budget responded to the positive PART review by recommending an increase for this program.
- The Partners Program is revisiting the Program's long-term goals during the budget development process and will develop new long-term goals as necessary to ensure reasonable and attainable, yet challenging goals are set.
- The Partners Program is participating with OMB and other federal agencies in developing Common Measures of performance for wetlands, to help ensure consistency in establishing performance goals and in reporting accomplishments.
- And the Program intends to begin to more fully integrate program accomplishments information and activity-based costing data into the allocation process.

Further information on PART can be found in the Performance and Management Assessments volume of the 2004 President's budget.

2002 Program Performance Accomplishments

Resource Protection; Improve Health of Watersheds, Landscapes, and Marine Resources	FY 2002 Planned	FY 2002 Actual	Change	Reason for Change
Acres of wetland habitat off Service lands enhanced and/or restored	33,395	57,522	+24,127	More leveraging and landowner interest in wetland restoration than predicted.
Acres of upland habitat off Service lands enhanced and/or restored	179,467	158,176	-21,291	Fewer upland opportunities.
Miles of riparian and/or stream habitat off Service lands enhanced and/or restored	593	526	-67	Slightly less leveraging achieved than anticipated.
Resource Protection: Sustain biological communities.				
Acres off Service lands where invasive species have been controlled	33,683	34,066	+383	Slightly more leveraging achieved than anticipated.

Note: This table identifies the acres and miles of habitat “enhanced and/or restored” off Service lands by the Partners Program. The Partners Program conducts some of its activities “on” as well as “off” public lands. In FY04, the Program will be reporting its accomplishments “off” as well as “on” Service lands.

In FY 2002, the major accomplishments of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program directly supported the DOI’s draft Resource Protection Goal to improve health of watersheds, landscapes and marine resources through strategies that:

1) restored and maintained proper function to watersheds and landscapes through:

- The development of 3,745 voluntary stewardship partnerships with private landowners.
- The restoration of 57,522 acres of wetland habitat (benefitting wading birds and waterfowl).
- The restoration of 158,176 acres of upland habitat (benefitting declining migratory grassland and forest birds).
- The restoration of 526 miles of riparian and in-stream habitat (benefitting migratory songbirds, declining fish populations and aquatic species).
- The removal of 21 barriers to fish passage.

2) improved the information base, resource management and technical assistance through:

- The handling of 7,525 requests for technical assistance.

Also in FY 2002, the Service directly supported the DOI’s draft Resource Protection Goal to sustain biological communities through a strategy that created habitat conditions for biological communities to flourish through:

- The battling of invasive species on 34,066 acres via voluntary stewardship partnerships.

FY 2003 Performance Goal Estimates

Resource Protection: Improve Health of Watersheds, Landscapes, and Marine Resources)	FY 2002 Actual	FY 2003 Planned	Change
Acres of wetland habitat acres enhanced and/or restored	57,522	39,074	-18,448
Acres of upland habitat enhanced and/or restored	158,176	160,979	+2,803
Miles of riparian and/or stream habitat enhanced and/or restored	526	468	-58
Resource Protection: Sustain biological communities.			
Acres off Service lands where invasive species have been controlled	34,066	33,683	-383

Note: This table identifies the acres and miles of habitat “enhanced and/or restored” off Service lands by the Partners Program. The Partners Program conducts some of its activities “on” as well as “off” public lands. In FY04, the Program will be reporting its accomplishments “off” as well as “on” Service lands.

In FY 2002, the Partners program was one of two Service programs assessed using the Administration’s Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART). The performance goals listed above were used for reviewing the program and determining its overall effectiveness.

The Service will continue to support DOI’s draft Resource Protection Goal to restore and maintain proper function to watersheds and landscapes by:

- Restoring approximately 39,074 acres of wetland habitat.
- Restoring 160,979 acres of upland habitat.
- Restoring 468 miles of riparian and in-stream habitat.
- Removing 21 barriers to fish passage.
- Responding to approximately 7,450 requests for technical assistance.

This work is typified by activities such as what will take place in Texas and Oklahoma where the Service is working with private landowners and the National Wild Turkey Federation to improve grazing management, fence streams and riparian areas, and restore native plants and grasses along the Canadian River. The project will restore 60,000 acres of grasslands and 50 miles of riparian habitat.

The Service will also work through voluntary stewardship partnerships to support the DOI End Outcome Goal of sustaining biological communities by treating over 33,683 acres of private lands to control invasive species. This work is typified by activities such as what will take place in Iowa, where Partners program staff along with private landowners, the Loess Hills Alliance, and the Golden Hills RC&D will remove invasive red cedar trees from the Loess Hills, a rare ecosystem located in western Iowa. This project will benefit rare and declining plant and animal species including several species of skippers (butterflies), cactus, yucca and plains pocket mouse, thus restoring the function of the surrounding watershed. Five hundred acres are slated for restoration in FY03.

Justification of Program Changes

Subactivity		2004 Budget Request	Program Changes (+/-)
Partners for Fish and Wildlife	\$(000) FTE	38,378 245	+8,920 +25

The FY 2004 Budget Request for Partners for Fish and Wildlife is \$38,378,000, a net program increase of \$8,920,000 from the 2003 President's budget request level.

General Program Increase (+ \$9,600,000) - The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, a component of the Secretary's Cooperative Conservation Initiative, has helped over 28,700 private landowners voluntarily restore fish and wildlife habitat on their lands thereby increasing land productivity and fish and wildlife populations on over 1.64 million acres of private land and over 4,740 miles of streams and riparian areas. The program currently has a waiting list of over 2,000 landowners seeking technical and financial assistance to improve the quality of their property. The funding will provide additional opportunities for the Service to expand its four C's effort increasing cooperation, consultation and communication, with the end goal of improved conservation.

The increase will help achieve program goals and is vital for the Service's efforts to expand community based habitat restoration activities and will be used to target landscapes, habitat types, and species that will benefit from increased conservation efforts by private landowners. The program increase is a direct result of the positive PART assessment. Attention will be directed at migratory birds, inter-jurisdictional fish, and threatened and endangered species that will benefit most from concerted conservation efforts by private landowners. With the general program increase, the Service will be able to restore an additional 27,291 acres of wetland, 126,528 acres of upland, and 362 miles of in-stream and riparian habitats above the FY2003 levels. This work will be accomplished through 2,500 additional voluntary stewardship partnerships.

Below are a few examples of how the additional funding will be used.

- Sediment reduction and water quality improvement in the Six Mile Creek in Tompkins County. The City of Ithaca and other community members will work with the Service to return a portion of the stream to a more natural and stable profile.
- Expand the Mitchell River Watershed Protection and Restoration Project in North Carolina. This multi-partnered project is designed to improve water quality and protect recreational and cultural features along the river. The Mitchell River is a State-designated Outstanding Resource Water in the north-central piedmont. Specifically, the project will involve planting and protecting riparian buffers along agricultural fields, fencing to prevent livestock from damaging the streambanks, and installing alternative watering systems for livestock.
- In Texas and other parts of the southwest, the Service will be able to focus restoration efforts in aquifer recharge zones. Groundwater aquifers throughout the southwest are often being pumped at rates faster than they are being recharged.
- Invasive species control will be another area in which the additional funding will be utilized. In Oklahoma, the Service will work with private landowners, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the National Wildlife Turkey Federation to restore 14 miles of riparian habitat along the Beaver river. The work will include removing saltcedar, an invasive exotic shrub and replanting with native species.
- Funding will also be used to continue to nurture productive working relationships with multi-agency groups and multi-organizational coalitions, like the Tallgrass Legacy Alliance in Kansas, to provide additional opportunities for private landowners and other interested groups to pool their resources

so they can better address conservation needs and issues at local levels.

By capitalizing on these opportunities the Service and its conservation partners will further enhance fish and wildlife habitats and the species that occupy them, as well as provide significant additional opportunities for hunting, fishing and observing and enjoying wildlife.

Nutria Control (+ \$500,000) - Nutria, a large rodent native to South America, has become one of the most damaging invasive mammals infesting the United States. The animals feeding habits have proven incredibly destructive of north American fresh water marshes. Nutria are found in states which border the Gulf of Mexico, and have established a strong foothold in the Chesapeake Bay. The risk to native fish and wildlife habitats, as well as the local and state economies tied to their natural resources, has focused attention on the control and eradication of nutria, particularly in the Chesapeake Bay. The Service has worked with 27 federal, state and private partners to develop a Nutria Control Pilot Project Plan for the Chesapeake Bay. The additional funds will assist ongoing efforts to control and eliminate nutria from coastal wetlands in the Chesapeake bay basin and Louisiana. Working with the National Wildlife Refuge System, 80,000 acres will be treated.

Relationship of Program Changes to Performance Goals - The proposed increase will support DOI's draft Resource Protection Goal of sustaining biological communities by creating habitat conditions for biological communities to flourish. The funds will be used to reduce the number of acres infested with an invasive species and thus create habitat conditions for native biological communities to flourish. Specifically, the increase will enable the Service to implement control efforts on an additional 6,000 acres.

Jobs-in-the-Woods (- \$1,000,000) - The Jobs-in-the-Woods program was established under the Northwest Economic Adjustment Initiative which was designed to help local communities affected by a downturn in natural resource industries within the Northwest Forest Plan area. The JITW program has two main purposes: (1) to provide watershed restoration opportunities on non-Federal lands, and (2) to provide employment opportunities in natural resource-dependent communities in western Washington, Oregon, and northern California. Since 1994, \$20.9 million have been appropriated for this program. Funding for the Jobs-in-the-Woods program has been reduced by \$1,000,000 (to \$1,362,000) to accommodate higher priority Service activities in FY 2004 and because restoration activities that have been supported through Jobs-in-the-Woods may be funded through other federal or Service programs such as the Landowner Incentives or Private Stewardship Grant Programs.

The Service will work vigorously with its partners involved in the Jobs-in-the-Woods Program to help secure funding from alternative sources, such as state and local conservation programs, conservation organizations and various grant programs administered by the federal government, including ones available from the Service. Securing comparable funds from alternative sources will maintain the same levels of services and benefits for the local community and, in addition, will provide the Service with opportunities to address other high priority resource needs and opportunities.

Relationship of Program Changes to Performance Goals - Jobs-in-the-Woods activities support the DOI Strategic Goal of Resource Protection with activities that roll up to support the DOI End Outcome Goals to improve the health of watersheds, landscapes and marine resources. The proposed \$1,000,000 decrease in the Jobs-in-the-Woods Program will reduce the Service's and Department's contributions to End Outcome Goal (i.e., 29 fewer acres of wetland, 383 fewer acres of uplands, 117 fewer miles of riparian and stream restoration, and 57 fewer partnership agreements). The Service anticipates, however, that additional funding may be available from States, conservation organizations, industry and citizen groups

in amounts that will offset these changes in Service accomplishments. Funding from these alternative sources will support voluntary, community-based, watershed restoration programs that benefit ESA-listed species and other trust species on non-federal lands.

Vermont Partners (Transfer \$149,000 to base) - Funding for the Vermont Partners (\$149,000) as an identified line-item is being eliminated. Funding will be transferred to General Program Activities and the Vermont program will be operated at a level consistent with overall program priorities.

Relationship of Program Changes to Performance Goals - The transfer of funds to the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program base will have no effect on performance goals. Funded activities will still directly support the DOI Strategic Goal of Resource Protection with activities that roll up to support the DOI End Outcome Goals to improve the health of watersheds, landscapes and marine resources and sustain biological communities.

Travel Reduction (-\$53,000) - The request includes a \$53,000 reduction for travel expenses to be accomplished by curtailing unnecessary travel and relocation costs, as well as increased teleconferencing and use of central meeting locations.

The Service employs approximately 8,000 permanent full-time staff at approximately 700 field stations supported by seven regional offices and the Washington D.C. headquarters office. Many of the staff transfer from one field location to another or accept assignments at the Washington or regional offices to expand their professional experience or increase the level of responsibility in the organization. Service employees frequently travel to meetings such as professional association national, state or local chapter quarterly and annual meetings. The Service recognizes that there is significant benefit to be obtained by having employees work at different locations and at increasing levels of responsibility. The proposed decrease will not eliminate the opportunity for relocating, but will increase the time between moves.

Direct, mission related travel and travel associated with training will not be impacted by the proposed reduction. The Service will carefully evaluate policies and procedures related to attendance at meetings and conferences and will institute policies to limit redundancy in attendance.

IT Reduction (-\$127,000) - The Department is undertaking significant information technology reforms to improve the management of IT investments, to improve the security of systems and information, and to realize short and long-term efficiencies and savings. The Department is taking a corporate approach that will include consolidated purchases of hardware and software, and the review of select IT functions including centralized help desks, email support, web services, centralized network management, and coordination of training. The Service estimates a savings of \$6.6 million by participating in these Departmental efforts.

In addition, the Service will achieve an additional \$2 million in savings in other operational IT investments by centralizing management of geographic software, implementing desktop standards, consolidation of the Service messaging platform and other similar activities.

The Partners program's share of this reduction of \$27,000 reflects the anticipated savings from these cost cutting measures and reforms.